

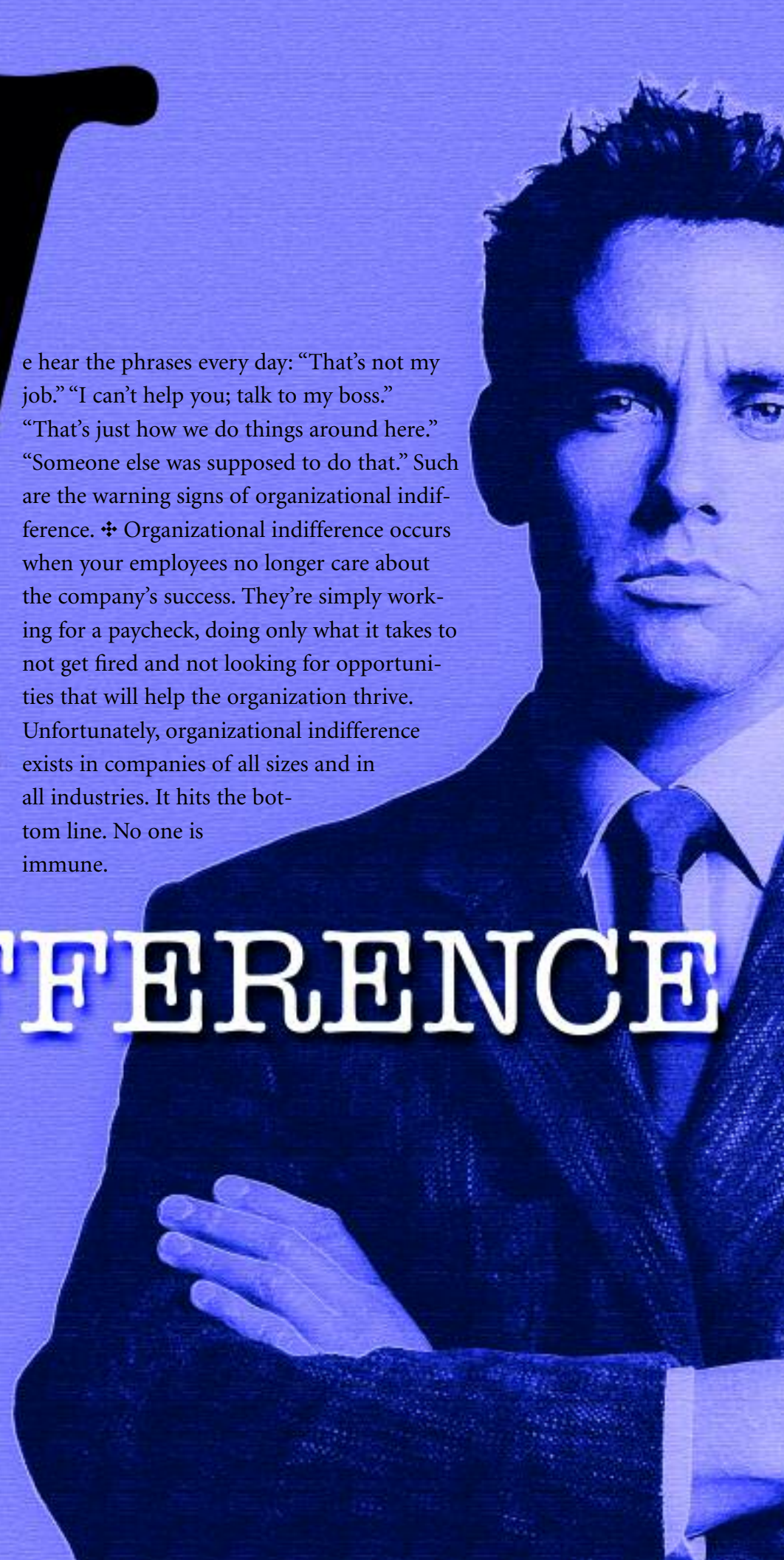
OVERCOMING

ORGANIZATIONAL

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*How much do you care when your employees don't?  
By Linda Keefe*

e hear the phrases every day: "That's not my job." "I can't help you; talk to my boss." "That's just how we do things around here." "Someone else was supposed to do that." Such are the warning signs of organizational indifference. ❖ Organizational indifference occurs when your employees no longer care about the company's success. They're simply working for a paycheck, doing only what it takes to not get fired and not looking for opportunities that will help the organization thrive. Unfortunately, organizational indifference exists in companies of all sizes and in all industries. It hits the bottom line. No one is immune.



INDIFFERENCE

**H**ow much organizational indifference is in your company? What percent of your employees come to work just to get a paycheck or to add the organization to their résumé? Ten percent? Twenty-five percent? Maybe 75 percent? Realize that no matter what percent you perceive, the reality is usually much greater. When you consider all the labor costs involved in recruiting, hiring, training and paying benefits, do you really want even one organizationally indifferent person on your team?

When you rid your team of organizational indifference, your employees are eager to express new ideas and genuinely want to help clients. They are excited to come to work because they know their contributions matter and they have a definite purpose in the organization. As a result, customers enjoy doing business with the company, thus increasing your revenue and profitability. Additionally, your operating expenses and turnover decrease as employees take a more active role in the company. Productivity soars as each employee strives to make a positive impact on the bottom-line.

Think the above scenario couldn't possibly come true in your organization? Think again. It is possible to overcome organizational indifference and transform your team into a unified workforce with an entrepreneurial spirit that sustains focused effort, flexibility and the willingness to seize new opportunities. To analyze where your team is on the indifference scale and begin to fill any gaps that exist, rate how well your employees perform each of the following tasks.

#### 1. COMMUNICATE THE ORGANIZATION'S VISION

The company's vision is more than words on paper. It's a lofty goal of where you want the company to be and how you want the community to perceive the organization. While the business owners and senior level executives usually know and strive to uphold the company's vision, front line employees typically have only a

vague idea of the vision and cannot fully grasp its importance. This is unfortunate, because if you want a unified, entrepreneurial spirit to take hold in your organization, your team must understand and believe the vision you set forth. Your employees can only operate at their best when they have a reason to do so.

When your employees know and embrace the vision, they'll have a newfound purpose for their everyday activities. They'll have a sense of the "big picture" and will be able to understand how their actions, routine as they may be, contribute to the greater goal. Studies show that people want to do their best; they want to excel, to be involved and to take an active leadership role in their job. However, they can only do that when they believe that their contributions matter and they see value in their actions.

Walk around your organization and ask your employees if they know 1) the company's vision, 2) what it means, and 3) how their actions contribute to it. If they are unable to answer all three parts of the question, it's time to explain the vision in detail and exemplify it with your actions.

#### 2. USE THE TECHNOLOGY TOOLS THEY HAVE AVAILABLE IN AN EFFECTIVE MANNER

Most employees know how to "get around" in various computer programs and they know how to create a sales piece, a spreadsheet or a brochure; however, many of those people could reduce the amount of time they spend on their tasks if they simply knew the productivity skills for the given technology. The fact is that no matter how much you invest in technology and no matter how many training sessions you send your people to, you'll never know if your employees are using the technology effectively unless you measure their performance. You must know where your people are in terms of their technological skills as well as where you want them to be.

Ask yourself, "How effective is the technology training we've done?" "Do my employees really get their tasks done in the shortest amount of time?" and "How much downtime do my employees have as a result of equipment malfunctions?" Most company leaders find that their employees actually have very

little understanding of the skills that would increase their productivity and make their documents better.

To accurately uncover the truth behind the technology in your office and your employees' skill level, have an outside consultant track your team's productivity and downtime. Also, have the consultant question your employees about their comfort level with various technologies so your team can tell you where they want additional training. The more proficient your employees are with the technology tools available, the more capable they'll be able to serve clients and create results.



**WALK AROUND YOUR ORGANIZATION AND ASK YOUR EMPLOYEES IF THEY KNOW THE COMPANY'S VISION, WHAT IT MEANS, AND HOW THEIR ACTIONS CONTRIBUTE TO IT. IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO ANSWER ALL THREE PARTS OF THE QUESTION, IT'S TIME TO EXPLAIN THE VISION IN DETAIL AND EXEMPLIFY IT WITH YOUR ACTIONS.**

#### 3. ROUTINELY GIVE PRAISE AND RECOGNITION

For an organization to thrive and for employees to feel valued, there must be a company-wide environment of praise and recognition. An ideal environment is one where not only does management praise and recognize employees, but also employees praise and recognize each other and the management team. Why is this so important for dispelling organizational indifference? Because any kind of team endeavor is going to be enhanced when the team members approve, praise and encourage each other's efforts. Conversely, when team members have a negative view towards each other, then the team typically falls apart.

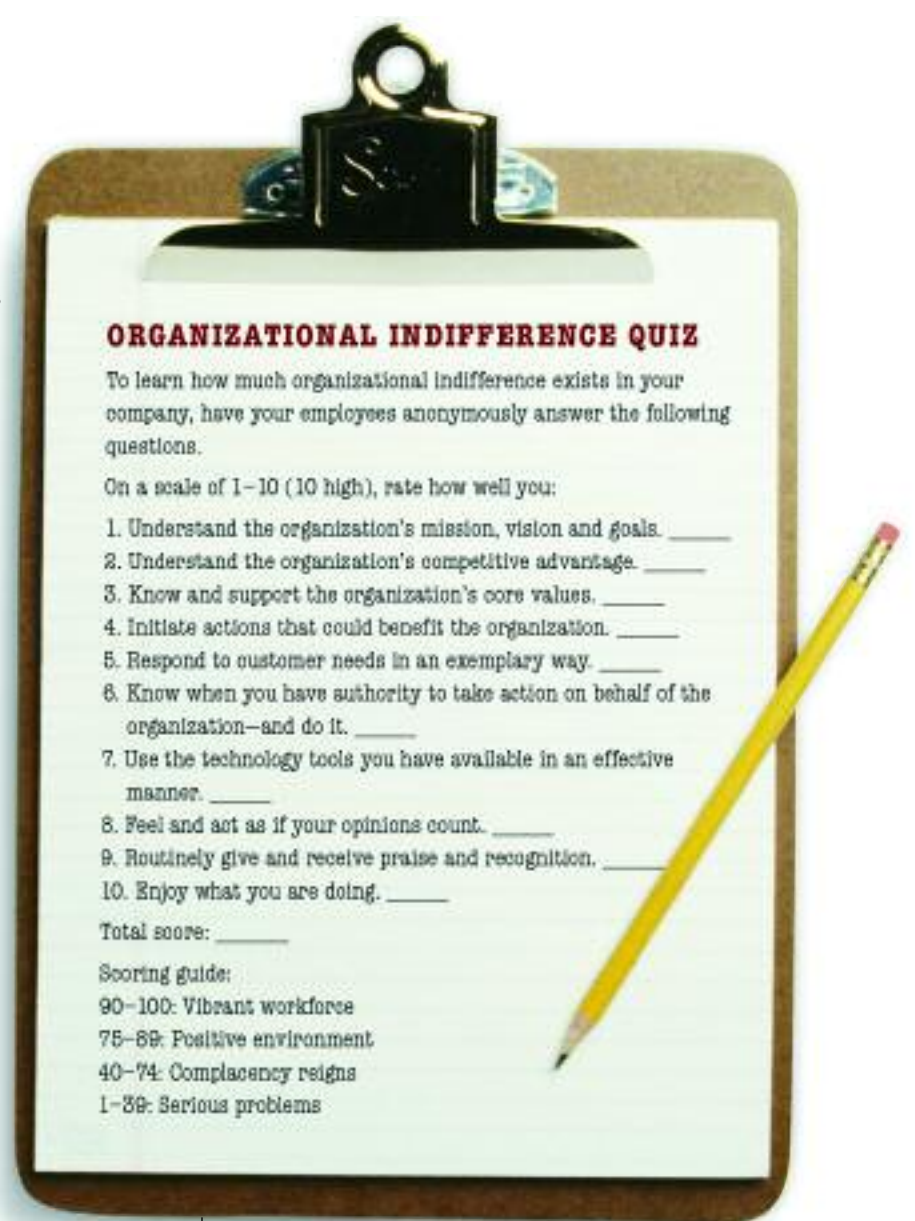
In order to create an environment of praise and recognition, CEOs and senior managers must lead by example. Answer this: Have you given praise and/or recognition to your employees in the past seven days? Do your employees know what is expected of them? Do you give your employees opportunities to learn and grow? If you answered "no" to any question, then you need to give greater focus to your praise and recognition efforts. Establish avenues where employees can receive recognition, such as in company newsletters, postings on bulletin boards or even with handwritten thank-you notes from the management team. Show your employees that they're valued and they in turn will value the company.

#### 4. KNOW WHEN THEY HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO TAKE ACTION ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANIZATION—AND DO IT

Many company leaders talk about empowering their employees, but when it comes time for employees to exert their authority in a situation, they quickly learn that empowerment does not exist. That's because too many company executives fail to realize that empowerment is more than assigning authority; rather, empowerment is a three-fold process that builds trust between the employees and the corporation.

First, when employees are empowered, they know precisely how much latitude they have in any given situation. They don't have to second-guess themselves when they make decisions because managers have detailed what each person can do. Second, when empowered employees have reached the limit of their authority, they know the steps to take to find out additional information or to make suggestions. Finally, empowered employees are not afraid to think outside the box or offer ideas because they know they have management's support and that the senior executives want their input. They feel that the company values their ideas and strive to devise new ways to help the organization perform better.

As you strive to empower your workforce, take the time to detail the latitude each person has, the processes in which to channel new ideas and ways for managers to show their support. And remember that empowerment is a two-way street. It's a shared responsibility between employees and managers that instills trust and responsibility in every team member.



### ORGANIZATIONAL INDIFFERENCE QUIZ

To learn how much organizational indifference exists in your company, have your employees anonymously answer the following questions.

On a scale of 1–10 (10 high), rate how well you:

1. Understand the organization's mission, vision and goals. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Understand the organization's competitive advantage. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Know and support the organization's core values. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Initiate actions that could benefit the organization. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Respond to customer needs in an exemplary way. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Know when you have authority to take action on behalf of the organization—and do it. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Use the technology tools you have available in an effective manner. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Feel and act as if your opinions count. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Routinely give and receive praise and recognition. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Enjoy what you are doing. \_\_\_\_\_

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

Scoring guide:

- 90–100: Vibrant workforce
- 75–89: Positive environment
- 40–74: Complacency reigns
- 1–39: Serious problems

#### PROVEN RESULTS

When your employees know what the organization is about, how to use their technology effectively, how to instill team motivation and what their empowerment processes are, you lay the groundwork for eliminating organizational indifference. And when your employees care about the organization and are excited about their work, they'll solve more problems, serve customers better and contribute to the company's success significantly, thus increasing bottom-line profits. It's the combination of these four elements that moves the organization forward and unifies people with the entrepreneurial spirit that leads to long-lasting results. ■

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